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SUBJECT: NCP OFFERS ELECTION STRATEGIES AND STRESSES POST-REFERENDUM STABILITY

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: On June 2, CDA Whitehead made introductory calls on Presidential Advisor Ghazi Salah Eddin as well as NCP strategists Yahya Babiker and Sayed Al-Khateeb. The NCP praised the Obama Administration's "new approach" to U.S.-Sudanese relations, provided some insight into NCP election strategies, and stressed the importance of stability in approaching the landscape of a post-referendum Sudan in 2011 and beyond. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) Presidential Advisor Dr. Ghazi Salah Eddin welcomed CDA Whitehead by declaring with a smile that he was pleased to see the U.S. and Sudan "engaged at this level for the first time in 20 years," noting the recent invitation for the NCP to go to Washington for a June 23 meeting. Regarding his recently being assigned the Darfur portfolio, Salah Eddin claimed that the "problem has ripened," and is "ready for fresh ideas." He stressed that any solution to the Darfur crisis needs Chadian buy-in, and that talks in Doha have now "bogged down." He added that both sides need to get away from "minor issues that don't concern Darfuris," citing as an example the ongoing dispute between the Justice and Equality Movement and the Government of Sudan over prisoner releases. Regarding preparations for the June 23 conference in Washington, he pledged that "the humanitarian issue" involving the international NGOs would be solved and "out of the way" within the next three weeks. On Abyei, Salah Eddin said that while both sides had "agreed in theory" on the outcome of arbitration in The Hague, the issue remains a "silent crisis."

13. (SBU) Salah Eddin proclaimed "it is in the interest of us all to hold elections soon," and stated that the NCP's preference would be to "maintain its alliance with the SPLM" despite what he termed the SPLM's "unreliability" caused by its "internal factions." Due to this, Salah Eddin predicted a possible "anti-NCP alliance" scenario for election day, though he proffered hope that the SPLM might still take the NCP up on the latter's "fair deal" offer of power-sharing and resolution of North/South border issues. Asked whom the SPLM might propose as an anti-NCP alliance candidate, Salah Eddin said "perhaps someone like Malik Agar, someone who can present himself as the 'African' candidate and straddle the North/South divide." Rather ominously, Salah Eddin concluded his discussion of elections by warning that "we are aware of the divide-and-rule strategy that the SPLM is now using in the South ... and we are better at it than they are."

14. (SBU) In regard to the 2011 referendum in the south on possible secession. Salah Eddin hinted that the law governing the process might be finalized and passed soon, possibly in the next three weeks (before the CPA Forum Conference in Washington.) However, he warned that "because of an inappropriate exercise of SPLM power," the referendum act may lie stagnant in the National Assembly. Salah Eddin said he believes that, in the end, "secession will happen, but that the South will suffer for such an emotional choice." He stressed the need for a coherent plan for stability in a post-2011

Sudan, regardless of the outcome of the referendum.

¶5. (SBU) At the Center for Strategic Studies, an NCP think-tank, NCP insiders Yahya Babiker and Sayed Al-Khateeb offered similar views on the importance of a stable, post-referendum Sudan. On the U.S. role, the two strategists suggested that an "endorsement of unity" is needed to "ensure faithful implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA)" and that the NCP/SPLM partnership in the Government of National Unity needs to be "revived" at both the national and state levels. Should the referendum end up splitting Sudan in two, Al-Khateeb stated "it might not be the worst possible outcome... a clean break would be better than a messy unity or a messy break."

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT: While all three NCP hands were on message, Salah Eddin offered the most candid assessment of current political rumblings within the party. While these NCP officials all expressed continuing good will toward the U.S. in the wake of Special Envoy Gration's two visits, it will be interesting to see whether or not the NCP is able to deliver on both the NGO issue and the referendum law before the June 23 meeting in Washington. Salah Eddin certainly appears sincere in his efforts to achieve these goals. During meetings with the MFA and Humanitarian Assistance Commission (HAC) on June 4, the GOS announced that due to Dr. Ghazi's personal intervention, Mercy Corps Scotland and CARE International Geneva will both be registered within one week; that visas will be approved expeditiously; and that the HAC will show more flexibility on the transfer of assets of expelled NGOs to new or existing NGOs, per the U.S.-Sudan April 10 understanding on humanitarian assistance.

WHITEHEAD